



Town of Portland, Connecticut

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Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer

Office of Parks and Recreation

I am not in favor of House Bill 6574. If passed, this bill would negatively impact the Town of Portland's ability to provide safe and affordable childcare to Portland residents. In order to ensure that our Summer Quest program for children entering Grades 1-6 meets the Office of Early Childhood's licensing requirements, I would likely need to cut the Kiddie Camp program for children ages 3-5 and cut the Teen Camp program for children entering Grades 7-9. I would also need to reduce the hours of operation of our Summer Quest program from ten hours a day to seven hours a day while also increasing the cost of the program. This bill would also eliminate our ability to accept registrations for a week of Summer Quest up until Thursday of the week prior. This will negatively impact families that do not have the financial stability to pay for an entire summer's worth of childcare prior to the start of summer.

The cost of running our Summer Quest program would increase substantially if this bill is passed. Additional costs include paying an APRN or physician to sign and date all medical log information weekly while also paying them to be on retainer and to be responsible for all health care including first aid for the entirety of the summer. After speaking with the Executive Director of the Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association, I am confident in saying that the cost of having a APRN or physician on retainer would increase expenses by at least \$10,000. Additional costs include a camp licensing application fee and the required cost of having the state process background checks for new employees and returning employees every 5 years at a rate of \$88.50 per employee. This bill would also increase payroll expenses.

Municipal camp programs are still dealing with the ramifications of minimum wage increases. On June 1, 2023 the minimum wage will increase for the fifth time since 2019. If this bill is passed, then there will be even more pressure placed on municipal camp programs because the Office of Early Childhood requires both a Camp Director and First Aid Director to be onsite at all times. If we continue to offer Summer Quest for ten hours a day, then I would need to hire three Camp Directors and three First Aid Directors for our Summer Quest program because one person cannot work ten hours a day and because I would need to have a backup in place in case one of the Camp Directors or First Aid Directors is unexpectedly unable to work due to illness or other unforeseen circumstances. We are already facing difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. Instead of searching for one Summer Quest Camp Director, I would need to search for three Summer Quest Camp Directors and three First Aid Directors if this bill is passed. This is not feasible or realistic. The only possibility of making sure our program meets the O.E.C.'s certification requirements would be to reduce the hours of Summer Quest from ten hours a day to seven hours a day in order to reduce the amount of necessary Director level staff from six to four. Reducing the hours of Summer Quest would not solve all of the issues that would occur if this bill is passed. I would still need to cut Kiddie Camp and Teen Camp because I cannot realistically staff those programs while also making sure Summer Quest is fully staffed according to the Office of Early Childhood's guidelines.

The increased expenses outlined above will undoubtedly result in a more expensive registration cost for Summer Quest. I am already planning to increase the cost of this program for the 2023 summer due to the abovementioned minimum wage increase. If this bill is passed, then families in Portland will be faced with even higher registration costs for the 2024 summer.

Many families in Portland and around the State are living paycheck to paycheck. Municipal camp programs like Summer Quest provide these families with affordable child care and a flexible registration process. Summer Quest families can register for a week of Summer Quest up until Thursday of the week prior. If this bill is passed, then families in Portland will be forced to pay for the entire summer before the program begins due to the paperwork requirements imposed by the Office of Early Childhood. Any necessary individual care plans must be submitted and approved by the Office of Early Childhood prior to the start of camp. This means that late registrations will not be possible because the Portland Parks and Recreation Department will need to rely on the State to process these documents.

I believe that our Summer Quest programs already provide safe childcare to our residents. If a parent of a child in a private camp raises a concern to the camp's director and is not satisfied with the response, then that parent has no choice but to go to the State for assistance. If a parent of a child in Summer Quest raises a concern to the camp's director and is not satisfied with the response, then they can bring their concern to one of two full-time Parks and Recreation employees that work year round to ensure that our programs are safe. They can also bring their concern to our Town's First Selectman who is elected by our Town's residents and works to protect their interests. Private camps do not have these additional levels of supervision. All of our Summer Quest staff members are CPR, First Aid and AED certified. All of our Summer Quest Staff members complete the State's Mandated Reporter training. We require a staff to child ratio of 1 to 10, which is more stringent than the Office of Early Childhood's required ratio of 1 staff to 12 children for ages 6-16. We require children that need medication at Summer Quest to provide us with Authorization for the Administration of Medication Forms that are signed and reviewed by physicians prior to the child attending our programs. I am confident that our Summer Quest facility is safe because it take place at the Portland High School/Middle Complex which houses our Town's Grades 7-12 students safely each school year.

I am not in support of House Bill No. 6574. This bill would increase the cost of childcare in Portland while also reducing the amount of available spaces in our Summer Quest program.

Thank you,

Andy Dionne
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